

TRANSCRIBED HANDWRITTEN NOTES OF DANIEL ELLSBERG (1964)
ON THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS

(Underlining added by D.E. in 1964)

(Dots [....] are in D.E. notes, indicating material omitted
by D.E. in 1964)

[Brackets indicate D.E. comments, 1964]

{These brackets indicate D.E. comments, February 1989}

Oct. 18, 5 PM -- President, Secretary of State, Thompson, Hillerbrand, Akalovsky, Gromyko, Semenov, Dobrynin, Sukhodrev

Mr. Gromyko then said that the Soviet Government had already indicated that it would do nothing with regard to West Berlin before the US elections; unless it was compelled to do otherwise by the activities of the other side. However, the Soviet Government proceeded from the fact that it was necessary to hold an active dialogue in November to bring about concrete results with regard to a German peace treaty and to the normalization of the West Berlin situation on the basis of such a treaty.

23 August '62 -- ISA

Item 5 (in list by McGeorge Bundy) {NSAM 181, actions and studies directed by President Kennedy "in light of the evidence of new bloc activity in Cuba"; Item 5 assigned to ISA: drafted by Henry S. Rowen} -- "Probable military, political and psychological impact of the establishment in Cuba of SAMs or SSMs which could reach the US."

1. Most probable present Soviet missile activity would be introduction of SA-2's. ...have been introduced in Indonesia and on order by UAR and IRAQ...

Other missiles which could be introduced now or later are SSMs of ranges from 150 miles of some of the Soviet IRBMs. SSMs with a range greater than 700 miles would require relatively substantial installations [NO]; shorter-range missiles are mobile and could be introduced very quickly without elaborate construction.

SSMs might also be introduced by use of Cuban ports by Soviet missile carrying subs. Soviet missile force is greatly hindered in operations far from home and near US by absence of a forward base such as we have at Holy Loch. Moreover, sub-missiles could be kept under tighter Soviet control than land-based.

2. Military impact.

SAMs would make recon difficult and dangerous.

SSMs would constitute a very significant military threat to the continental US. reduced warning... Cuban SSMs would present an immediate threat for which there is no easy answer. It appears probable that on military grounds alone, the establishment of such a capability would be unacceptable. At a minimum we would probably have to adopt a large scale and continuing SAC airborne alert.

[depends on numbers; "Nobody accepted this."] {Quote is from Rowen in 1964; I can't recall precise meaning/now.}

3. Psychological impact of a Soviet missile estab. in Cuba

The psychological impact of any [sic] substantial ["substantial" was later deleted] Soviet-provided missile force would undoubtedly be great: in the US, in Cuba itself, in the rest of the Western Hemisphere, and in NATO. Yet it is possible that this impact would be qualitatively different and much lighter if only SAMs were involved.

The Soviet Union, in making a decision to supply the Cubans

with missiles of any sort, is obviously staking a claim to a large-scale military foothold in the Western hemisphere. This would be a major departure in Soviet policy. On the other hand it can be argued that this claim was already staked when Migs were delivered a year ago. The arrival of the Migs did not cause great disturbance to American or hemisphere opinion. Militarily, neither the Migs nor SAMs represents a decisive change. Yet the military problem of recon and possible attack grows progressively more difficult with each such addition to Cuban defensive strength.

Moreover, if Soviet installations can be described persuasively as defensive in character, the difficulty of justifying a forceful US response is increased.

In sum, any missiles would have a substantial psychological impact, while SSMS would create a situation of substantial and justified alarm, even in absence of proof that nuclear warheads were arriving with them. The arrival in the Western Hemisphere of systems depending for their effectiveness on nuclear weapons [unlike Il-28's: Rowen comment] would mark a very significant change in Soviet policy bound to have worldwide effects. Outside of the US this move would be taken as a major step, signalling the arrival of a state of nuclear symmetry between the US and the Soviet Union. In addition it would be evidence of growing Communist power in Latin America. Domestically there undoubtedly would be widespread concern at development of a new threat. Very likely there would be widespread domestic support for drastic counteraction.

6 September ISA Rowen [&DIA?] for President

"Advantages and disadvantages of making a statement that the US would not tolerate establishment of military forces (missile or air or both) which might launch a nuclear attack from Cuba against the US?"

1. It should first be noted that the character of Soviet military aid to Cuba thus far does not indicate the building of Cuban military capability designed for attack on the US. ...so far as known at present, seems primarily aimed at improving defensive - particularly air defense -- capabilities. Main line of propaganda... focuses on Cuba's right to defend itself against "aggression" [quotation marks circled]. With respect to nuclear weapons, it would mark a very significant change in Soviet policy to date if nuclear weapons were to be turned over to the Cubans, or even deployed to Cuba under Soviet custody.

2. At the same time, it cannot be ruled out that Soviet policy may shift, and that the creation of a nuclear threat on the US "doorstep" might appeal to the Soviets as an appropriate counter to US deployment of an alleged nuclear threat close to the Bloc periphery.

....

4. Advantages.

[a.] A strong US statement warning against the establishment of nuclear-capable forces in Cuba would serve clear notice to the Soviets that we are reaching the limits of patience on their military intervention in the Western Hemisphere. To the extent that the Soviets are probing to see how far they can go, a firm commitment of US prestige to stopping the build-up of a nuclear military threat in Cuba could cause the Soviets to weigh the risks of provoking us into action in a part of the world where we hold all the geographic advantages.

b. A US declaration would pave the way for taking firmer sanctions. If the Soviets continued to support a Cuban buildup, we could take the position that their actions threatened the security of the US and of the hemisphere, and that we therefore considered ourselves justified in taking necessary means to cut off the flow of arms, such as interception and turning back of Soviet shipping...

Needless to say, if we intend to make declaratory statements at all, we will have to be prepared to back them with some sort of action or take a damaging prestige setback.

c. In many parts of the world the US image would be improved by statements and action showing determination of purpose and a clear concept of vital national interest.

d. A warning statement keyed to the nuclear threat would have the advantage also in some quarters of underscoring US tolerance and patience, even to the point of permitting a Communist state on the very doorstep of the US until the unacceptable condition of a nuclear threat from that state came into the picture.

5. Disadvantages

a. If it is accepted [?] that the unequivocal existence of Cuban-based nuclear weapons would be unacceptable from the standpoint of US security [?] -- and that we would therefore take action to neutralize the threat -- then consideration of disadvantages from a declaratory warning hinges mainly on the effects from a warning made in advance of the clear establishment of a nuclear threat.

b. An advance warning confined to the nuclear threat would...cast US policy in a rigid mold. It could be inferred that the US intended to do nothing unless Cuba actually established a nuclear capability, which would tend to increase Castro's freedom of action in other nations and lower the morale of Cuban resistance elements. Unless accompanied by supporting indications of US firmness and unanimity, an advance declaration would probably have a questionable deterrent effect on Soviet efforts to enlarge a military foothold in Cuba.

c. An advance declaration would give Soviets legalistic propaganda leverage to argue that in view of US-controlled nuclear bases ringing the Bloc, the US was in no moral or political position to proscribe the establishment of a modest nuclear counter-force on the periphery of North America. Thus, a statement might very well have a reverse effect and help provide the justification for establishment of a nuclear capability in Cuba.

[The Soviet Union didn't try this {after US warnings in September}. Point is: To object to fact of Soviet missiles, in anger and pain, is more acceptable than to claim right, in tranquility, to keep them out.]

["Why is US raising issue -- except to assert superiority?"]

d. ...US would be vulnerable to large-scale propaganda counter from Communists that Soviet aid to Cuba was only for purposes of defense against American aggression and interference...

6. Conclusions

a. Disadvantages of an advance declaration concerned with a nuclear threat only would appear to outweigh the advantages.

b. A declaration made after the existence of nuclear forces had been determined would be useful to the extent that it was followed up by action to eliminate the threat.

[planning?]

c. Making introduction of a nuclear capability the criterion for US action has the inherent disadvantage that it allows time for further strengthening of Cuban armed forces, air defense, possibly submarine bases, so that any eventual military operations that might prove necessary against Cuba would become more difficult and costly.

d. Final conclusion is that any declaratory warning issued by US should not be confined only to the nuclear aspect of a Cuban

military buildup, and should not be made at all unless the US is prepared to take action to thwart the buildup.

13 September - Executive session of USIB (U.S. Information Board)
 (Deputy Director notes)

USIB members had generally agreed that all agencies would:

a. Avoid all publishing of any intelligence on:

- 1) MRBMs in Cuba
- 2) The existence of a Soviet base in Cuba
- 3) That there are offensive weapons being delivered to Cuba such as SSMs, subs and bombers.
- 4) Use of Cuba as a transshipment point for the movement of arms to other Caribbean or Latin American countries.
- 5) Indications of Cuban aggressive actions.

b. Avoid briefing intelligence in all the areas indicated above, except any such intelligence may be passed verbally to those key individuals in each department which the military intelligence chiefs believed had an absolute need to know.

(restrictions had been imposed in DIAAP-3 informally several days earlier)

 18 Sept.

talking paper by Nigra {Col. LeRoy Nigra, Latin America Division Chief, in DIA Office of Estimates; member of Intelligence Committee on Cuba in DOD}, for DDIA (Director of Defense Intelligence Agency) for USIB meeting on SNIE (Special National Intelligence Estimate) 85-3-62

(earlier draft {word obscure} by USIB on 7 Sept.)

No reservations on discussion.

Draft conclusions by CIA do not adequately reflect one basic thrust: i.e. that the Soviets may be considering a change in policy and, in the absence of forceful reaction, may be tempted to introduce more "offensive" weapons in their step-by-step development of military capability in Cuba.

Recommended change: 29-33 :But we cannot exclude the strong possibility that the USSR is at least considering a change in policy. [C and D as used? What was CIA version?]

4 October - John Wright, memo for record

Subject: Suspicious Areas, Cuba

1. Analysis of patterns of confirmed SAM sites reveals two areas in Western Cuba which are defended by SA-2's for no apparent military reason.

2. On about 25 or 26 September I recommended to Col. Cole and Captain Grayson, SAO, that next flight cover these areas. Cole and Grayson informed me that there might not be any further high altitude flights due to the apparently operational status of the SA-2's in Cuba. I emphasized the necessity of knowing whether or not the Soviets were installing MRBM's in those areas, and they agreed to make every possible effort to secure photo coverage.

3. With the possibility of no more approved flights, got all available info from CIA on suspect areas; on 3 Oct., Lt. Col. A.C. Davies briefed him; agreed to look into possibility of targetting agents into these areas, but noted that the ultra stringent security measures currently in effect in Cuba did not indicate a high degree of success.

1 October - Analysis of SAM sites, John Wright

1. Intelligence comm. {committee? community?} has now identified a total of 15 SAM sites. From the location of these sites, a discernible pattern is developing:

...(near military bases, but...)

Further west in the Pinar del Rio Province a triangular pattern of 3 SA-2 sites cannot be connected with any significant military installation.... curiosity is immediately aroused to the purpose of this triangular pattern on the far western tip of Cuba. [JW's 2nd area? Not covered Oct. 14?]

[no #2]

3. In the north central portion of the Pinar del Rio Province is a large trapezoid-shaped restricted area controlled by the Soviet military personnel recently introduced into Cuba, measuring 15-20 miles on a side. There are no known military installations in this rough and sparsely populated area. According to reports from refugees arriving in Miami, all Cubans have been evacuated from this restricted area. Purpose of this restricted area is not currently known.

4. Info concerning deployment of Soviet military personnel and "technicians" recently arriving is derived from unevaluated refugee sources, however, an attempt has been made to plot all reported locations to determine whether there is any correlation between the location of Soviet personnel and missiles or missile activity. So far, pattern indicates that there is a definite correlation, but significantly the greatest concentration of Soviet personnel, activity and camps is in the Western end... would indicate greater Soviet interest in Pinar del Rio than in other provinces.

5. A single unevaluated report states that the Soviet "SS-4 Shyster" missile may have been delivered to Cuba on or about 11 Sept. Some confusion is apparent in this report. The SS-4 is nicknamed "Sandal" while the "Shyster" is SS-3. This confusion was caused by the interrogations of the source using a recognition manual which designated the SS-4 as the Shyster. However, the description of the missiles reportedly observed by the source could have applied equally to the Shyster or the Sandal. Both have essentially the same outward appearance except that the Sandal is about 5 feet longer.

...In all other respects, including missile carrier, the two appear identical. Source stated that on 12 September he had personally seen some 20 such missiles in vicinity of [Campo Libertad?], a small airfield on western edge of Havana. While this report is still unconfirmed and there are no other reports concerning the presence of either SS-3 or SS-4 missiles...

...the presence of operational SS-4 missiles in this location (restricted area) would give the Soviets a great military asset.

10 October: Il-28's identified: first hard evidence

11 October: published

12 October -- DDIA - Memo to Secretary of Defense, CJCS

Restrictions Applicable to Dissemination of Certain Intelligence on Cuba

As a result of a discussion on control of certain intelligence on Cuba between the President and Mr. McCone on Thursday, 11 October, a meeting was held ...

2. disclosed by Gen. Carter that the President desired that immediate action be taken to severely curtail the dissemination of all intelligence relating to the Soviet Bloc supply of arms and other support to Cuba that disclosed or implied the creation or existence of an offensive capability. Intelligence in these categories is to be restricted on an absolute need-to-know basis and is to be provided only to those who perform in advisory capacities to the President on operational or policy matters relating to the Cuban problem. This will constitute an extremely small list of personnel...

A code word (PSALM) will be associated with all intelligence in this category...

6. The President pointed out to Mr. McCone that his concern with respect to the close control of this type of intelligence stemmed from a desire to assure that national planning and policy considerations bearing on the Cuban problem are conducted in the strictest security. The President indicated further that the movement of such intelligence from source through the evaluation process to the need-to-know recipients should be accomplished in the future with absolute minimum loss of time...

(above): Normal analytical processing of such intelligence will continue in the intelligence agencies and the head of each intelligence activity will exercise some freedom of action to include intelligence personnel on separate access lists under his control.

Proposed DOD list: SecDef; DepSecDef; Secs of Depts; AssSecDef ISA; SJCS; JCS; DJS; D J-5; D J-3. SACS; USIB; limited number of officers in Services engaged in contingency planning.

DDI/Citne?

13 Oct.: approved list to DDCI; DOD less Services; McNamara; Gilpatric; Nitze; Taylor; DDIA; Deputy DIA (Quinn); J-2; DJS (Riley); J-5; J-3; Krulak [?]; SACS; (Not Service Secs?)

Also, nominated for controlled access (?): CINCSAC, NORAD, STRIKE, CANT, CARIB - and two officers on each of their staffs.

15 Oct.

Gen. Carroll directed that information on new types of crates seen on board Soviet ships be kept in PSALM category.

[Hitchcock: Il-28 photos had been seen all over, because they were "only crates." Hence, need to publish. Hence, need for PSALM.]

19 Oct.: DDIA now not less than 8,000-9,000 Soviet military specialists in Cuba.

17 Oct. - Draft SNIE 11-17-62

Soviets probably calculated that the US was already inhibited in good part by the large political and military consequences of an overt attack and by hints of Soviet retaliation elsewhere. (The Soviets in their 11 Sept. statement and subsequent conversations, have made a connection between Cuba and Berlin. They probably intended that the US, when it discovered missiles in Cuba, should think of Berlin as a Soviet hostage.)

[A plausible guess, and key Soviet miscalculation. Could have deterred blockade.]

It is possible that the Soviets have been encouraged, by a reading or misreading of US policy statements which suggested to them that the US was very reluctant to use force, to believe that the risks of this course were low. Alternatively, and in our view more likely, they have accepted considerable risks of an important defeat. If so, the Soviets are evidently prepared to play a dangerous game. They are gambling that the US can be deterred...

[Contrast to earlier ONE view of Soviets! "We couldn't have inspired this! They couldn't have such contempt for us!"]

["They won't change." "They have changed."]

[DID JFK AGREE?] [WRONG]

7. In either event, however, the USSR must have considered the possibility that its efforts would fail, and that it would suffer a decisive defeat in Cuba. In risking this outcome, we believe that the Soviets have publicly planned to respond in ways which would offset as much as is possible, the loss of a major political asset and the damage to Soviet prestige, but which would not, in their opinion, carry the risks of general war beyond their control. [SAM, Oct. 27]

....(Even) if the US limited itself to attacks against the missile sites and other military targets, the USSR would almost certainly take drastic action against US interests abroad. Such moves would [DIA: could] include similar retaliation against an overseas US base or bases, action to deny Berlin to the West and, if time allowed, a diplomatic-political offensive designed to destroy the whole framework of US alliances.

[Was this McGeorge Bundy's view?]

Nov. 29, '62 - President, Rusk, Thompson, Mikoyan, Dobrynin

President: There is no reason why statements that the US does not intend to invade Cuba should not go on record. Yet this is hardly necessary since it is obvious that the US could have invaded Cuba any number of times beginning with April 1960 but did not do so. This should suffice to make US intentions clear. As a matter of fact, only recently the President was speaking against those Americans who suggested an invasion of Cuba. Thus, once again the attitude of the US was clear. However, beginning in July the Soviets have sent over 100 ships loaded with arms and military material to Cuba. While this was going on the President, trusting official statements by the Soviet Union, continued to affirm that there was no danger to the US from an arms buildup in Cuba. This had led to very serious political difficulties on all levels.

(3) NO

Exercises
!

Mikoyan: What the President had said presents an extremely serious matter. Yet the Soviet Union does not deserve any reproach. No one can believe that the arms build-up in Cuba was offensive and intended against the US. [No denial that statements were misleading.] It had, in fact, been decided as early as June, by Chairman Khrushchev and his colleagues, of whom Mr. Mikoyan was one, that the US would be told about the arms build-up, in every detail, by the Soviet Union at an appropriate moment.

First it was intended to communicate with the US on a confidential basis and then to make an announcement to the press. Of course, this was something which the Soviet Union was not obligated to do since after all, the US does not inform the Soviet Union of its military moves. As for the purpose of the military build-up, it was obviously not offensive, no military man not even a civilian could ever believe that rockets in Cuba could be necessary or even useful for an attack against the US.

NO - FO is Western
Hemisphere

The decision had been made to inform the US after the elections so as to avoid influencing in any way the political campaign in the US. The President himself certainly would not want to have the elections influenced by Soviet moves [statements]. Of course on the 22nd of October no intimation of the buildup was made by the Soviet Union, but even if a disclosure had not taken place the Soviet Union would have brought the entire buildup to the attention of the US on November 8th or 10th, immediately after the elections.

Why
NOT?

President: problem not due to fact that the Soviet Union did not make a statement to the US about the arms buildup -- as it obviously has the right to proceed with any such measures without announcing them to the US -- but on the contrary that the Soviet Union had made a statement according to which no offensive weapons [?] were being sent to Cuba or were going to be sent there.

Mr. Mikoyan said obviously the two speeches had a different interpretation of the recent events. The fact remains that the purpose of the arms buildup in Cuba was defensive and not offensive. They were sent there to defend the island against

invasion and for no other purpose. It is silly to believe that those [40] missiles emplaced in Cuba could be needed for an attack on the {U.S}.

[Mikoyan to Bolshakov?]

Mr. Mikoyan would like to ask once more whether the President thinks that the Soviet Union wishes to attack the US.

The President said he did not know what may have been the reasons of the Soviet Government to establish the base. The fact is that it was established. UE

Cuba was not threatened by the US. At the end of September and throughout October the President attacked those people in the US who spoke in favor of an aggressive policy towards Cuba. There were no indications whatever at the time when, in June, Mr. McCloy said a decision [to tell] had been taken by the Soviet Union, that any aggressive moves by the US were contemplated. Had the question been addressed to the President by the Chairman at that time, the President would have been glad to say as he says now that no invasion of Cuba is intended. No

An invasion of Cuba is not a solution to the Cuban problem. We do not live now in the early days of the 20th century. The US has obligations extending throughout the world. It is true that there are refugees from Cuba who may annoy Castro but there is no policy on the part of the US government to invade Cuba. Unquestionably, as able a man as the Soviet Ambassador in the US must have been aware of that.

As for Soviet intentions, maybe war was not an aim of the Soviet Union, but it seems that a policy of threat may well have been the objective. Mr. Mikoyan said that a statement about the build-up would have been made in November. At that time the missiles would have already been fully emplaced. What would have been the position of the US government which had publicly affirmed its trust in the statements of the Soviet leaders?

The entire episode cannot be interpreted in any other way than as a major attack against the present Administration and the Government of the US.

The question is now how the lack of understanding between the two governments can be transformed into mutual understanding. Already in the recent past in the question of Laos and then again in that of Cuba, the two countries have come very close to the edge of the abyss. The question is now what about the future? How many more such near escapes or such situations of dire danger will happen during the next decade because the two governments do not understand one another? ||

[This is not the only source of conflict; but they do surprise each other, dangerously.]

....Mikoyan: the Soviet move into Cuba had for a purpose only defense and deterrence.... (Nixon in favor of invasion, also Pentagon generals)... Under such circumstances, there was good reason to prepare deterrents and defense. It is quite clear that such was the purpose of the Soviet Union, which was going to inform the US that what it intended through the buildup on Cuba was the defense of that island and not an aggression against the US. After all, the Soviet Union had more than enough long-range missiles emplaced on its own territory to need anything else. 42 missiles are insignificant for offense and therefore it is clear that they were meant for defense. Moreover, these missiles remained in the hands of the Soviet military and could not have been used without signal authorization from Moscow. Mr. Mikoyan would like to mention in confidence that there exists Soviet legislation which makes it illegal to place nuclear or TN [thermonuclear] weapons under non-Soviet control. *Castro: who will you change it?*

...President: Of course, it is clear that the US government has very little liking for the present government of Cuba. This, however, does not mean an intent to invade them. After all, the Soviet Union does not like the present government of Albania. This does not mean that the Soviet Union will invade Albania, as in such a case as well as in that of a hypothetical invasion of Cuba, international consequences could be very grave. [?]

The President stated he is not, however, so terribly interested in Mr. Castro. What he is interested in, once again, is the attitude of the Soviet Government. How is it possible to go through the coming decade if we are, as in the past, to move from crisis to crisis.

Nov. 4, 1962 -- Kuznetsov - McCloy

Kuznetsov registered an objection to our constant reference to the deception that the officials of this country had been exposed. (sic) There had been no obligation to tell US of the character of

weapons they were introducing into the island of Cuba.

McCloy said this was probably so, but there was obligation among the friendly countries to respond truthfully to an inquiry when so much was at stake.

[earlier: Kuznnetsov argued about our characterization of weapons in Turkey as defensive that we were calling offensive in Cuba. McCloy said we would be glad to talk to him about our bases abroad at some other time.]

[See JFK reply (Nov. 8?) to K Nov. 5 letter

See JFK - Mikoyan talk , Nov 29?]

[Notebook of 20 January 1963]

During crisis, hsr [Henry S. Rowen] said to me: "I think the Executive Committee put the chance of nuclear {war} very low, though they still may overestimate it 100 times [10? see below: "1/1,000"]; they may put it at 1 in 100."

But shortly after [Oct. 29, 1962], Nitze told him he had put chance of some form of nuclear war if we had struck missiles fairly high. hsr asked, what subjective probability? Nitze: 1 in 10. And he was low in the group.

hrs: If these people put the chance of nuclear war that high in that situation -- he would have said, 1 in 1,000 -- you can imagine what they think the consequences of using a nuclear weapon would be.

It would take a very great deal to make JFK or McNamara use a nuclear weapon. When McNamara came back from Berlin, having 'shaken his fist at the Wall and said we were ready to use nuclears,' Bundy asked him, "Why do you say irrational things like that?" McNamara: "I have to till we've built up our conventional forces. [But note Bundy memo in crisis: need for early nuclear threat in Berlin crisis.]

McG B? Crisis, 1989